

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY SOFIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8875

INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST

AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

AMEMBASSY WARSAW

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E.O. 11652: NA

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SUBJECT: EMIGRATION FROM BULGARIA

REF: A) STATE 236660; B) SOFIA A-83, AUGUST 12

1. SUMMARY: WHILE THERE ARE NO PRECISE OFFICIAL FORMULATIONS OF BULGARIAN OVERALL EMIGRATION POLICY (THE CONSTITUTION IS SILENT ON THE SUBJECT), IN PRACTICE LEGAL EMIGRATION IS OPEN ONLY TO A FEW VERY LIMITED CATEGORIES OF PERSONS. VIRTUALLY ALL THE JEWS WHO WANTED TO LEAVE BULGARIA HAVE DONE SO IMMEDIATELY AFTER WORLD WAR II. THE TURKISH MINORITY IS SO LARGE THAT THE TURKS HAVE HAD TO ASK THE BULGARIANS TO RESTRICT EMIGRATION. THERE ARE ALSO MORE SPECIFICALLY POLITICAL RESTRICTIONS ON INDIVIDUAL EMIGRATION, BUT COMPARED TO OTHER WESTERN COUNTRIES WE HAVE A SLIGHTLY BETTER THAN AVERAGE TRACK RECORD. END SUMMARY

2. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS: SINCE OFFICIAL STATEMENTS OF BULGARIAN EMIGRATION POLICY HAVE PROVED LARGELY COSMETIC, IT HAS BEEN NECESSARY TO RELY HEAVILY ON INFERENCE IN TRYING TO REALISTICALLY EVALUATE THE
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SITUATION. WE HAVE REVIEWED OUR EXPERIENCES AND CANVASSED

ALL OTHER WESTERN EUROPEAN EMBASSIES IN SOFIA, INCLUDING GREEK AND TURKISH. A MAJOR FACTOR IS CLEAR, INTENTIONAL, AND FOR MOST PART SUCCESSFUL GOB CAMPAIGN TO LIMIT ACCESS OF BULGARIANS TO FOREIGN EMBASSIES. IN ALL VISA CASES, IMMIGRANT AND NON-IMMIGRANT, CONSULAR DEPARTMENT OF BULGARIAN MFA TRIES TO ACT AS INTER-MEDIARY BETWEEN APPLICANT FOR FOREIGN VISA AND EMBASSY INVOLVED. IN TURKISH AND GREEK CASES GOB HAS CALLED IN REPRESENTATIVES OF THOSE EMBASSIES AND POINTEDLY INFORMED THEM OF POLICY. IN MOST CASES, AS IN OURS, GOB HAS BEEN CONTENT TO INSTRUCT ALL APPLICANTS FOR EXIT DOCUMENTATION TO PROCURE FOREIGN VISAS THROUGH BULGARIAN CONSULAR DEPARTMENT, AND TO MONITOR VISITS OF BULGARIANS TO FOREIGN EMBASSIES. ALL WESTERN EMBASSIES HAVE PROTESTED AND, LIKE OURSELVES, MOST ARE GIVEN ACCESS TO SPECIFIC VISA APPLICANTS ON DEMAND. THIS PROCEDURE, HOWEVER, EFFECTIVELY SCREENS OUT UNDERTERMINABLE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO MIGHT OTHERWISE APPLY FOR OR AT LEAST DEMONSTRATE INTEREST IN EMIGRATING FROM BULGARIA. PROCEDURE DRASTICALLY CIRCUMSCRIBES MEANINGFULNESS OF STATISTICS ON VISA APPLICATIONS, VISA REFUSALS, AND VISA ISSUANCES AS BASE FOR ESTIMATING POOL OF POTENTIAL EMIGRANTS AND PERCENTAGES OF THAT POOL WHICH BULGARIANS ALLOW TO LEAVE.

3. KEEPING THESE LIMITATIONS IN MIND, FOLLOWING SUB-PARAGRAPHS ARE KEYED TO PARAGRAPH 2 OF REFERENCE (A).

A. POLICY TOWARD EMIGRATION: MUST CONCLUDE BULGARIAN POLICY TOWARD EMIGRATION, INCLUDING TO UJSS., IS RESTRICTIVE. OF 81 IMMIGRANT VISAS WE HAVE ISSUED SINCE BEGINNING OF 1968, ALL HAVE HAD TIES WITH PERSONS ALREADY IN U.S. WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS THEY HAVE BEEN IMMEDIATE RELATIVES OF PERSONS WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY LEFT BULGARIA LEGALLY, WHICH USUALLY MEANS THEY LEFT BEFORE 1944. SIGNIFICANT PERCENTAGE OF THEM HAVE BEEN BULGARIAN BRIDES OF BULGARIAN-AMERICANS WHO HAVE RETURNED BULGARIA EXPRESSLY TO MARRY CHILDHOOD SWEETHEARTS, AND HAVE THEM RETURNED TO U.S. A FEW PRIESTS HAVE EMIGRATED TO U.S. TO TAKE OVER BULGARIAN ORTHODOX PARISHES. IT IS MUCH EASIER TO SPECIFY GROUPS FOR WHOM GOB WILL AUTHORIZE EXIT - THOSE WITH RECOGNIZED, LEGAL, IMMEDIATE RELATIVES ALREADY IN U.S. MOST LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OTHER BULGARIANS SEEM TO BE DENIED EXIT PERMISSION. OUR EXPERIENCE IN THIS REGARD IS GENERALLY SHARED BY WESTERN EUROPEAN COLLEAGUES. IT MUST BE BORNE IN MIND IN THIS CONNECTION THAT BULGARIA HAS ALLOWED VIRTUALLY ITS ENTIRE JEWISH POPULATION (ACCORDING TO SOME ESTIMATES, 45,000 OR A TOTAL OF 50,000 -- I.E., ALL WHO DESIRED TO LEAVE --) TO EMIGRATE IN THE YEARS IMMEDIATELY AFTER WORLD WAR II AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ISRAEL.

AS NOTED, BULGARIAN GIRLS MARRIED TO BULGARIAN AMERICANS HAVE LITTLE DIFFICULTY GAINING EXIT PERMISSION FROM BULGARIA. WHILE WE HAVE NO DIRECT EXPERIENCE, OTHER EMBASSIES TELL US SUCH IS NOT CASE WHEN FOREIGN GIRL MARRIES BULGARIAN MAN. ONLY IN MOST UNUSUAL CASES HAS EXIT PERMISSION ON BASIS OF MARRIAGE BEEN GIVEN TO BULGARIAN MALE. SOME EMBASSIES HAVE BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL REGARDLESS OF SEX OF BULGARIAN APPLICANT.

ONLY SUCCESSES DURING PAST FIVE YEARS IN PROMOTING EXIT PERMISSION FOR BULGARIANS WISHING EMIGRATE TO JOIN FAMILY MEMBERS WHO EXCAPED FROM BULGARIA OR LEFT ILLEGALLY HAVE BEEN REOTSTERED BY AUSTRIANS. THEY HAVE HAD THREE OR FOUR CASES FAVORABLY RESOLVED, AND ATTRIBUTE THEIR SUCCESS TO CONSTANT AND PERSISTENT BADGERING OF GOB AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY AT ALL LEVELS ON SPECIFIC CASES.

MINORITIES: HAVE NO FIRST-HAND INFORMATION RELATING TO DIFFERENTIAL TREATMENT OF ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS. GREEK AND TURKISH EMBASSIES BELIEVE THERE ARE CERTAIN MCOORITY GROUPS WHICH HAVE NOT ASSIMILATED WELL INTO BULGARIAN SOCIETY AND WHICH GOB HAS NO SPECIAL INTEREST IN KEEPING. THEY INCLUDE ARMENIANS, GIPSIES, JEWS, MANY TURKS, AND CERTAIN GREEKS. THEY POINT TO SUBTLE DISCRIMINATION

AGAINST AND/OR INDIFFERENCE TOWARD THESE

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INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

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GROUPS, AND TO FACT THEY HAVE VARYING NUMBER OF MEMBERS THESE GROUPS APPLYING FOR IMMIGRATION TO THEIR COUNTRIES. (BOTH EMBASSIES OPERATED ON ASSUMPTION THAT IF BULGARIAN VISITS EMBASSY TWICE OR HAS BLESSING OF BULGARIAN CONSULAR DEPARTMENT, IT PRIMA FACIE EVIDENCE THAT HE HAS OR WILL RECEIVE EXIT PERMISSION.)

AS FOR CURRENT OR RESIDUAL JEWISH EMIGRATION, GREEK EMBASSY ISSUES TWO OR THREE TRANSIT VISAS EACH WEEK TO JEWS TRAVELING ISRAEL, BUT DOES NOT KNOW WHETHER THESE ARE ULTIMATELY IMMIGRANTS OR VISITORS. IRBULGARIAN TOURIST STATISTICS SHOW 191 PERSONS AS HAVING DEPARTED FOR ISRAEL IN 1973, OF WHOM 170 GAVE PURPOSE OF VISIT AS "PRIVATE". SOME OF THESE MAY OF COURSE HAVE REMAINED.

B. EVOLUTION OF PRACTICES: WITH EXCEPTION OF TURKISH SITUATION (MORE FULLY DESCRIBED BELOW), AND OUR RECENT INDICATIONS FROM GOB THAT THEY MAY SYMPATHETICALLY REVIEW OUR "DIVIDED FAMILY" CASES, HAVE UNCOVERED NO OTHER EVIDENCE OF EVOLUTION OF BULGARIAN EMIGRATION PRACTICES. EVENTS TO DATE HAVE GIVEN CAUSE FOR ONLY MODEST OPTIMISM ON EARLY RESOLUTION OF OUR "DIVIDED FAMILIES" PROBLEM.

C. STATISTICS OF IMMIGRANT VISAS TO U.S.: HAVE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ISSUED 81 IMMIGRANT VISAS SINCE JAN 1, 1968, HAVE REFUSED ONE, AND HAVE 3 IN PROCESS. IN ADDITION HAVE APPROXIMATELY 60 OLDER UNRESOLVED "DIVIDED FAMILY" CASES, MOST OF WHOM WOULD, TO BEST OUR KNOWLEDGE, BE ELIGIBLE FOR U.S. IMMIGRANT VISAS IF THEY COULD OBTAIN NECESSARY BULGARIAN PERMISSION. ONLY "DIVIDED FAMILY" VISA ISSUED TO DATE WAS VISITOR'S VISA.

D. ESTIMATE OF POTENTIAL EMIGRANTS: FOR MANY REASONS, MOSTLY REVOLVING AROUND BULGARIANS' LACK OF ACCESS TO FOREIGN EMBASSIES, WE CANNOT ESTIMATE NUMBER OF SERIOUS APPLICATIONS WE MIGHT RECEIVE IF RESTRICTIONS WERE REMOVED BY GOB. FOLLOWING ARE A FEW INDICATORS HOWEVER.

WHILE WE HAVE NOT KEPT BOOK ON NUMBER OF BULGARIANS WITHOUT RELATIVES IN U.S. WHO VISIT EMBASSY ON OWN TO INQUIRE ABOUT IMMIGRANT VISAS, ESTIMATE THAT HAVE HAD SOMETHING IN NEIGHBORHOOD OF 15 TO 20 PER YEAR OVER PAST SEVERAL YEARS. THESE PEOPLE NO DOUBT REPRESENT SOME PERCENTAGE OF THOSE WHO MIGHT APPLY FOR IMMIGRATION IF GIVEN OPPORTUNITY.

AWARE FROM RECEIPT OF NAME CHECK REQUESTS FROM INS AND OTHER POSTS THAT THERE IS TRICKLE OF BULGARIANS ESCAPING FROM BULGARIA AND PRESENTING THEMSELVES AT REFUGEE CENTERS OR AMERICAN EMBASSIES FOR IMMIGRATION TO U.S.

DETAILS SHOULD BE AVAILABLE FROM INS.

KNOW OF ONLY THREE CASES OVER LAST FIVE YEARS IN WHICH TRAVELERS TO U.S. ON VISITORS VISAS WITH LIMITED EXIT PERMISSION FROM GOB HAVE ADJUSTED STATUS IN U.S. THERE MAY BE OTHERS. INS MIGHT KNOW.

TURKISH AND GREEK EXPERIENCES ARE INTERESTING AND INSTRUCTIVE. IN 1951-1952 TURKS AND BULGARIANS AGREED ALLOW OPEN EMIGRATION OF THOSE ETHNIC TURKS LIVING IN BULGARIA AT THAT TIME. OVER 710,000 PERSONS PRESENTED THEMSELVES AT BORDER FOR RESETTLEMENT IN TURKEY, CAUSING INTOLERABLE STRAIN ON TURKISH ADMINISTRATIVE AND SOCIAL ORGANS. ALSO BROUGHT INTO SHARP FOCUS QUESTION OF MORALITY OF RAISING PEOPLE'S HOPES AND THEN EITHER OFFERING THEM REDUCED ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES OR REFUSING THEM POSSIBILITY OF LEAVING BULGARIA AND RESETTLING IN TURKEY. AFTER THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING FORCED TO REFUSE SOME INDIVIDUALS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ENTRY TO TURKEY, AGREEMENT WAS REACHED TO LIMIT IMMIGRATION.

GREEK EXPERIENCE ALSO INTERESTING. AT END OF WW II THERE WAS SIZABLE GROUP OF AXIS SYMPATHIZERS WHO FOLLOWED BULGARIAN ARMY BACK TO BULGARIA. SHORTLY THEREAFTER THERE WAS ANOTHER SIZABLE GROUP OF COMMUNIST GUERRILLAS WHO ESCAPED INTO BULGARIA AS COMMUNIST INSURRECTION IN GREECE WAS CRUSHED. GREEK EMBASSY ESTIMATES THAT THERE ARE ABOUT 10,000 MEMBERS OF THESE TWO GROUPS STILL IN BULGARIA. GOB ALLOWS, POSSIBLY EVEN URGES, THESE PEOPLE TO RETURN TO GREECE. GREEK EMBASSY ESTIMATES THAT OVER PAST THREE YEARS THEY HAVE HAD 350-400 APPLICATIONS FROM PEOPLE IN THESE CATEGORIES. THEY HAVE REFUSED ALL BUT ONE. (OUR SINGLE IMMIGRANT VISA REFUSAL CONCERNED A MEMBER OF THIS GUERRILLA GROUP -- SEE PARA C ABOVE.)

PERHAPS AS RESULT OF THEIR HISTORY AND CULTURE, BULGARIANS APPEAR TO HAVE AT LEAST COME TO TERMS WITH THE UNPLEASANT ASPECTS OF THEIR SITUATION, AND DO NOT SEEM TO NORMALLY THINK OF ESCAPE OR EVEN EMIGRATION WHEN CONTEMPLATING SOLUTIONS FOR THEIR PROBLEMS. HOW MANY WOULD CONSIDER EMIGRATION IF THAT ROUTE WERE EASILY OPEN TO THEM, WE HAVE NO WAY OF ESTIMATING.

E. INFORMATION FROM OTHER EMBASSIES: MOST WESTERN EUROPEAN EMBASSIES IN SOFIA DO NOT HAVE COMPLETE FILES ON EMIGRATION. HOWEVER WE HAVE INCLUDED EACH EMBASSY'S ANALYSIS OF THE EMIGRATION SITUATION IN THE INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THIS REPORT.

F. EXIT FEES: WHILE THERE IS SOME VARIATION DEPENDING ON TYPE OF EXIT DOCUMENTATION REQUIRED, STANDARD BULGARIAN CHARGES FOR PERMANENT DEPARTURE APPLICATIONS IN-

CLUDE A 5 LEVA (\$1.00-1.20 LEVA) APPLICATION FEE; 85 LEVA
PASSPORT FEE; AND APPROXIMATELY 20 LEVA FOR ADDITIONAL
EXPENSES SUCH AS COPIES OF DOCUMENTS, AUTHENTICATIONS,
AND NOTARIAL SERVICES. THIS 110 LEVA AVERAGE FEE DOES
NOT INCLUDE THE FEES CHARGED BY THIS EMBASSY FOR PROCESS-
ING THE U.S. IMMIGRANT VISA (50 LEVA). WHILE BULGARIAN
FEES ARE SOMEWHAT HIGH, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THESE CHARGES
CONSTITUTE SIGNIFICANT OBSTACLE FOR ANYONE SERIOUSLY
WISHING TO EMIGRATE FROM BULGARIA.

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